

NEWS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*

September 6, 1996

Mitch Snow 202-208-5634

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES: THE SECRET WORD IS "FISH"

Ask people who know the National Wildlife Refuge system about the animals that live within their boundaries and the first answer you're likely to get is "ducks." Some refuge lands have been purchased with Duck Stamp money, so there's good reason for that.

In fact, refuges are a lot like ducks, they both take to water. And where there's water, there are fish as well as fowl. Committed anglers among the refuge fans aren't likely to let on about the fish. They'd rather keep a good secret.

Of course, fishing on some refuges in the system is so good that the secret's been out for a long, long time. The 1,200 lakes and dozens of rivers and streams in Alaska's Kenai draw anglers from around the world, lured by the five different species of salmon that spawn there. One lucky angler on the Kenai netted the world's record for red salmon taken by rod and reel. Its king salmon runs are also world-famous.

Alabama's Eufaula Refuge, near the other corner of the continent, offers different fish, scenery, and climate but the same first-class fishing opportunities. The refuge itself includes Lake Eufaula and the upper reaches of the Walter F. George Reservoir. Anglers can find largemouth, white, and striped bass along with bluegill, crappie, and catfish--especially in the spring.

Good fishing opportunities on national wildlife refuges aren't limited to Alaska and Alabama. They can be found in almost every state and, for adventurous anglers, several U.S. territories. If you'd rather stick closer to home, there's a refuge within a short drive of most major metropolitan areas.

About half of the 508 refuges in the system are open to fishing. They range from outstanding seasonal trout fishing in the mountain states to bank fishing for walleye in the nation's heartland and year-round coastal saltwater fishing in the Southeast.

Employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency that administers the refuge system, have their own particular favorites.

One of the more frequently mentioned is Minnesota's Tamarac. True to its setting in the land of 10,000 lakes, Tamarac has 21 lakes, at least 5 of which--Two Island, North Tamarac, Wauboose, Lost, and Blackbird--are open to canoes or small boats. As their names suggest, these lakes are beautiful spots to enjoy angling



AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes naturally!

for northern pike and walleye. Hearty anglers can even enjoy ice fishing in season. Late in the summer, the Chippewa people harvest wild rice on these lakes; fishing regulations set by the White Earth Reservation apply at Tamarac.

Minnesota can also lay claim to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, along with the states of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Walleye, bass, and panfish are all in plentiful supply at the first refuge set up specifically to protect both wildlife and fish--and 133 different species of fish inhabit the refuge today. The refuge owes its existence to Will Dilg, founder of the Izaak Walton League.

North Carolina's Mattamuskeet also comes in high on the list of favorites. Stretching across 40,000 acres, Lake Mattamuskeet is the state's largest natural lake but it averages only about 2 feet deep. It's a great spot for largemouth bass and catfish. The lake connects to Pamlico Sound through four outlet canals. The canal bridges offer ideal fishing spots and good crabbing opportunities. The refuge's satellite areas provide anglers a chance for saltwater species such as spotted seatrout, red drum, and pompano.

Urban anglers might want to give Bayou Sauvage a try. Just a long cast away from the French Quarter in New Orleans, Bayou Sauvage offers thousands of acres of freshwater marsh and bay estuary for both fresh- and saltwater fishing.

The John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in Philadelphia also provides year-round fishing opportunities. John Heinz is one of the growing number of refuges that has facilities allowing disabled access. Hatchie refuge near Brownsville, Tennessee, is building accessible facilities for people with all types of disabilities, including amputees, wheelchair users, and visually impaired anglers. Other refuges with piers or other angling sites adapted for use by the disabled include Humboldt Bay, San Pablo Bay, and Tijuana Slough in California; Prime Hook in Delaware; Montezuma, Oyster Bay, and Wertheim in New York; Tewaukon and Upper Souris in North Dakota; Stewart B. McKinney in Connecticut; Chincoteague in Virginia; and Lewis and Clark in Washington.

A few general rules of thumb before you cast your line over any of the ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams you can find across the refuge system: On most refuges, state fishing rules apply. In some cases, more restrictive regulations may be in force. Remember, refuges are managed first for wildlife. Special regulations or season closings are sometimes necessary to benefit the other animals that call refuges home. Don't be surprised, for example, if the presence of nesting eagles or massive flocks of migrating ducks and geese mean that parts of the refuge are

off limits. The fact that these lands and waters are protected especially for animals is precisely what makes them such great places to fish.

Buy your state license, if you need one, before you head onto a refuge to fish. The Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't sell them and it's a pretty long trip to the nearest bait shop from some of the refuge system's best fishing holes. And it's always a good idea to have a plentiful supply of water, sunscreen, and bug repellent along on your trip.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency with responsibility for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 508 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and assists foreign governments in their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.